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Smarter Balanced States Approve Achievement Level Recommendations

Inclusive, collaborative process collected input from thousands of educators and community members using rigorous design; initial achievement levels will help teachers and parents monitor student progress and focus support in the classroom

OLYMPIA, WASH. (November 17, 2014) —Members of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium have voted to approve initial achievement levels for the mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA) assessments that will be administered in 17 states and one territory this school year. The vote marks an important milestone in the development of the assessment system.

“These initial achievement levels were developed with input from thousands of educators and community members, reflecting a diverse cross-section of views on education. Moving forward, the achievement levels, along with scale scores that also will be reported, will help teachers and parents understand student performance and needs for support,” said Smarter Balanced Executive Director Joe Willhoft.

The achievement levels serve as a starting point for discussion about the performance of individual students and of groups of students in mathematics and English Language arts. There are other measures that students, teachers and parents can also use to help evaluate the academic progress of students and schools, such as scale scores, growth models, and portfolios of student work. The states also unanimously approved a position paper to provide broad guidelines for how the scores and achievement levels can be used and interpreted by state officials, parents, teachers and other stakeholders (see attached).

Since Smarter Balanced is offering assessments for both ELA and math for grades 3-8 and high school, the recommendations include achievement level scores for both subject areas and at each of those grade levels. The attached charts display the threshold scores that distinguish four achievement levels and display the estimated percentage of students across all Smarter Balanced states who would have scored at each level based on data from the Consortium’s spring 2014 field test. Smarter Balanced estimates that the percentage of students who would have scored “Level 3 or higher” in math ranged from 32 percent in Grade 8 to 39 percent in Grade 3. In English language arts, the percentage of students who would have scored “Level 3 or higher” ranged from 38 percent in Grade 3 to 44 percent in Grade 5. See the attached charts for further details.

“Because the new content standards set higher expectations for students and the new tests are designed to assess student performance against those higher standards, the bar has been raised. It’s not surprising that fewer students could score at Level 3 or higher. However, over time the performance of students will improve,” said Willhoft.

Willhoft added, “It’s important to note that the figures released today are a Consortium-wide estimate based on the spring 2014 Field Test. Once the operational assessment is administered in 2015, states will have a much clearer picture.”

To create the achievement levels, Smarter Balanced organized an unprecedented level of educator and public input, involving thousands of interested constituents, using a rigorous process known as the “bookmark procedure.”



During an in-person panel, held in Dallas, Texas, close to 500 teachers, school leaders, higher education faculty, parents, business and community leaders reviewed test questions and determined the threshold scores for four achievement levels for each grade and subject area. Member states had representatives at each grade level for grades 3 through 8 and high school. Educators with experience teaching English language learners, students with disabilities and other traditionally under-represented students participated to help ensure that the achievement levels are fair and appropriate for all students.

In addition, an online panel was open to educators, parents and other interested members of the community to provide unprecedented input on the achievement levels. More than 2,500 people participated in the online panel.

A cross-grade review committee composed of 72 members of the in-person panels then took the results of the online and in-person panels into account to develop recommendations that coherently aligned across grades and that reflected student progress from year to year.

As an additional step, Smarter Balanced engaged an external auditor, an Achievement Level Setting Advisory Panel and its standing Technical Advisory Committee to review the recommendations before they were presented to the states for approval. The auditor and both advisory panels certified that Smarter Balanced conducted a valid process that is consistent with best practice in the field.

In approving the Achievement Levels, Smarter Balanced member states relied primarily on the recommendations from the Achievement Level Setting process. Members also gave consideration to other sources of information about the general content readiness of high school students to engage in credit-bearing college-level work. This included a comprehensive body of research on [college academic preparedness](#) of high school students conducted by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), the oversight body for the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

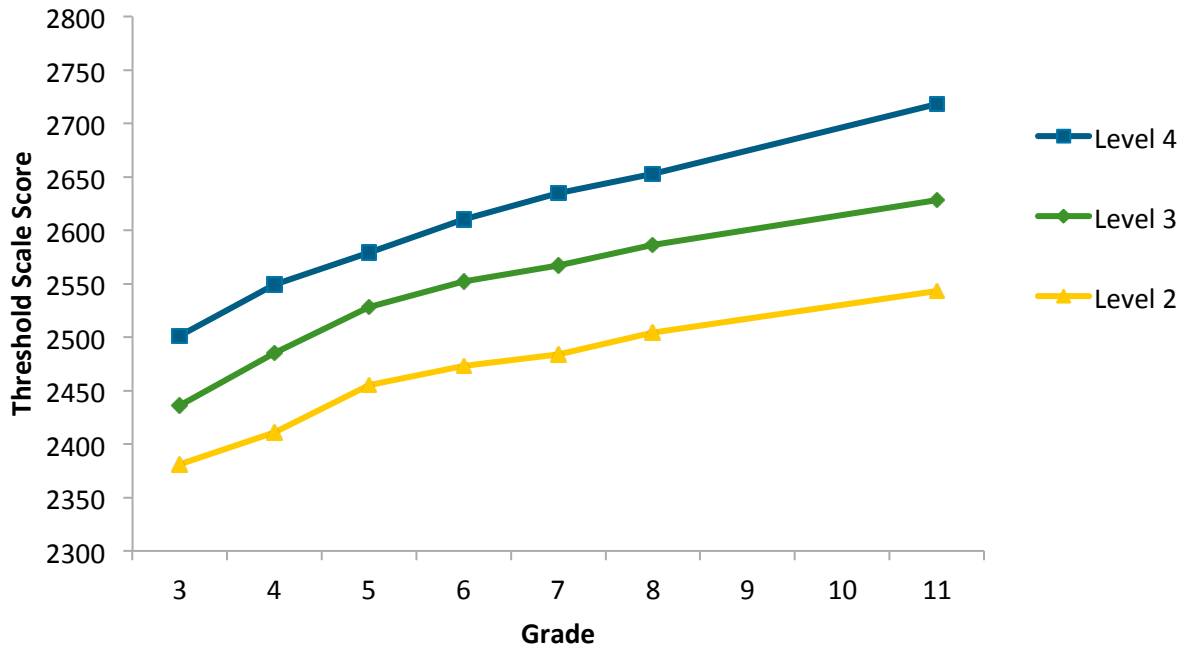
Over the coming months, member states will present these achievement level recommendations to the policy-making entities that have the authority to formally adopt achievement levels in each state. This authority most typically rests with the state board of education.

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About Smarter Balanced

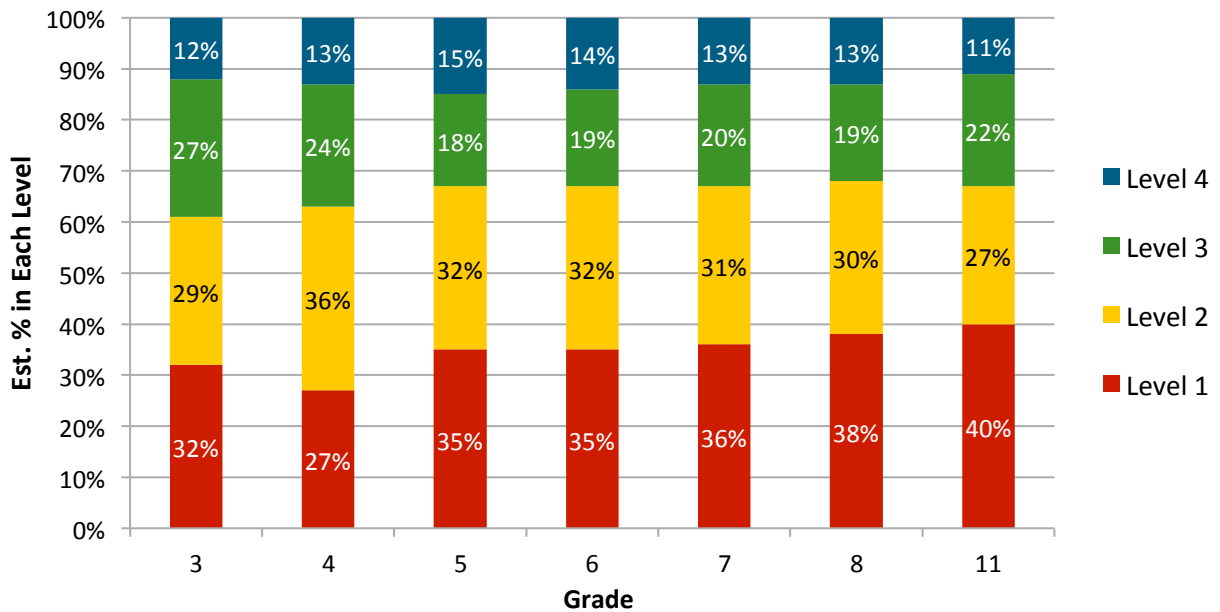
The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium brings together states to create a shared, innovative assessment system for mathematics and English language arts/literacy that is aligned with the Common Core State Standards and helps prepare students for success in college and careers. The Consortium involves educators, researchers, policymakers, and community groups in a transparent and consensus-driven assessment development process. For more information, please visit www.smarterbalanced.org.

Mathematics: Threshold Scale Scores



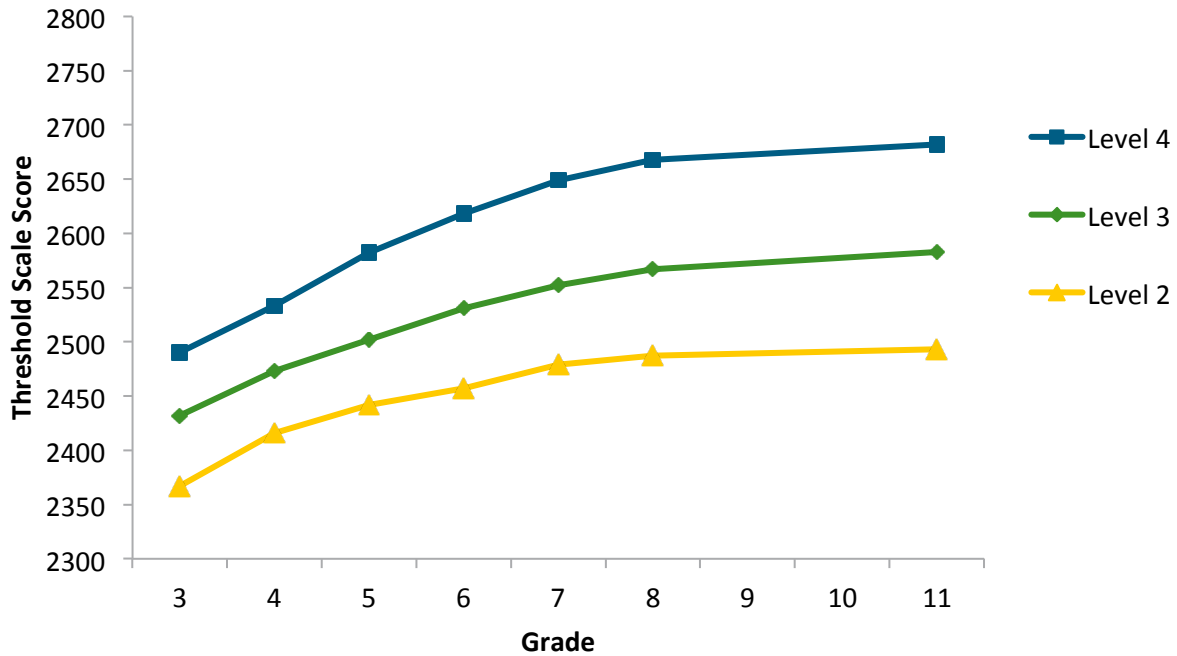
Adopted November 14, 2014

Mathematics: Estimated Percentage of Students Scoring at Each Achievement Level



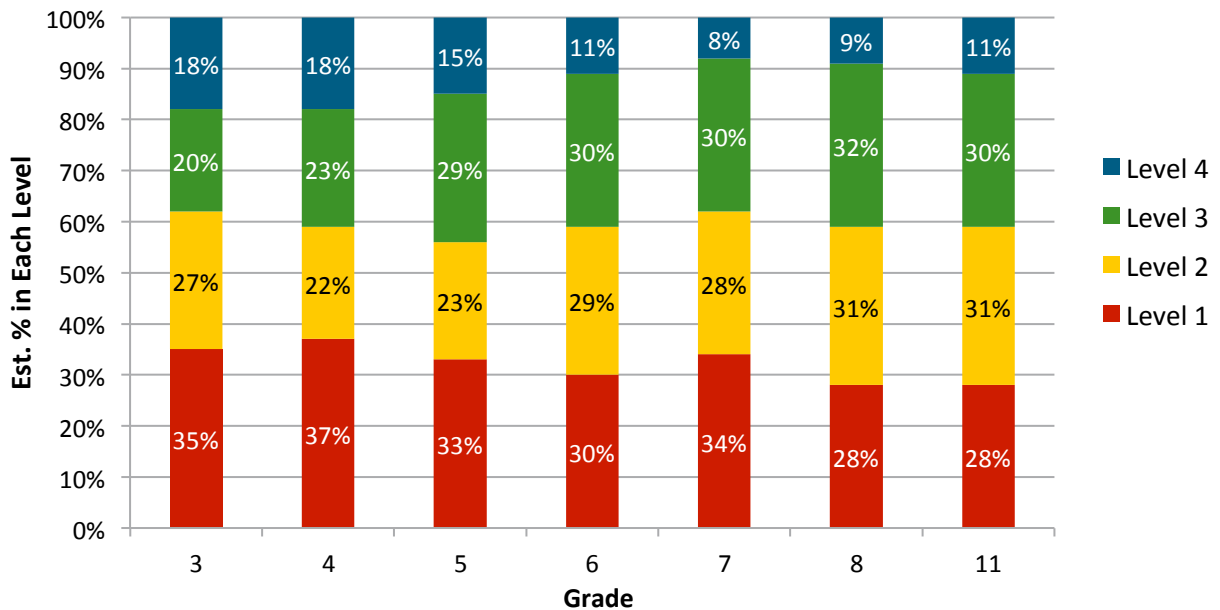
Estimates based on Spring 2014 Smarter Balanced field test in 21 states and USVI.

English Language Arts/Literacy: Threshold Scale Scores



Adopted November 14, 2014

English Language Arts/Literacy: Estimated Percentage of Students Scoring at Each Achievement Level



Estimates based on Spring 2014 Smarter Balanced field test in 21 states and USVI.